

I regretted very much the failure to secure this bridge, as, finding the defenseless condition of the country generally, and the little obstacle likely to be afforded by the militia to our progress, I had determined, if I could get possession of the Columbia Bridge, to cross my division over the Susquehanna, and cut the Pennsylvania Central Railroad, march upon Lancaster, lay that town under contribution (a favorite strategem of Early), and then attack Harrisburg in the rear while it should be attacked in front by the rest of the corps, relying, in the worst contingency that might happen, upon being able to mount my division from the immense number of horses that had been run across the river, and then move to the west, destroying the railroad and canals and returning back again to a place of safety. This project, however, was entirely thwarted by the destruction of the bridge, as the river was otherwise impassable, being very wide and deep at this point. (146)

Faced with a reverse, Early decided to concentrate his command in the York area. He ordered Gordon to march his brigade back to York on June 29, but not before he destroyed all the railroad cars available at that point. (147)

Early returned to York to learn that Colonels White and French had been fairly successful in destroying the railroad facilities at Hanover Junction and the mouth of the Conewago. White did not destroy all the bridges between Hanover Junction and York because "he reported that one or two of them were defended by an infantry force." (148) It was decided to spare the railroad buildings, two railroad car factories, and the hospital buildings in which Hoke's brigade had been quartered. Early gave his reasons for this action:

I was satisfied that the burning of them would cause the destruction of the greater part of the town, and, notwithstanding the barbarous policy pursued by the enemy in similar cases, I determined to forbear in this case, hoping that might not be without its effect even upon our cruel enemy. (149)

Bitterly, Early pronounced this policy a failure since his example had "been lost" upon the enemy. He had been "informed that it has been actually charged by some of their papers that Gordon's command fired the town of Wrightsville, whereas the exertions of his men saved the place from utter destruction." (150)

Captain Elliott Johnston, one of Ewell's aides, brought a message to Early on the evening of June 29 which changed the course of events for the Confederates in York. The note that the courier carried was a copy of a letter from Lee, with additional verbal instructions from Ewell that directed Early to move his division to the western side of South Mountain. Here he would rejoin the remainder of the Second Army Corps. In obedience to these orders Early placed